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FOUR TRADITIONAL THEATRES

The Bathah Trickster of Newar Theatre, Nepal

The Bhand Buffoon of Kashmir

The Krishna Play of Guruvayur, Kerala

The Language of Kathakali

The Bhānd Theatre of Kashmir*

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THE BHĀND PLAY AND THE PLAYERS

The word *bhānd* is in common use in all North Indian languages. In Urdu as well as Hindi, this word is used for a person who is not only a mimic but also a liar, somebody who makes false statements and is unreliable. Even in films the word is used in dialogue referring to someone who makes pretences or uses abusive language. Actually, the word has lost its original meaning in the past centuries: it is derived from the Sanskrit '*bhanda*', to jest or to mimic. *Bhānd* therefore means jester, joker, or buffoon. Another meaning of the word is 'utensil', the same as *bartan* in Hindi and *bhānde* in Punjabi and Dogri, The Kashmiri word *bānu* also has evolved from the original Sanskrit *bhand*. When we say '*vyapan bāna*' or '*ratan bāna*' in Kashmiri, we refer to someone's capacity to hold or grasp something. There is also another word used in Kashmiri to convey the sense of *bāna*, and that is *pātur*. If a son does not come up to his parents' expectations, he is called a *kvapātur* (Skt *kupātra*), and if he comes up to their expectations, he is called a *svapātur* (Skt *supātra*). *Pātur* has the same meaning as *bāna*, but it is directly related to a person or a character. In Sanskrit plays (*rūpaka*s or *nātaka*s), a character is called '*pātra*'. The Kashmiri word *päthur* too carries the same meaning. Thus we can say that both *bhānda* and *päthur* are Kashmiri forms of the Sanskrit words *bhanda* and *pātra*. Both the words have assumed their present forms through the passage of centuries.

Today in Kashmir a mimic or strolling actor, or one who plays the *svaranay* or *shahnāī*[1], entertains by buffoonery or gives a dramatic performance is called a *Bhānd*. A *Bhānd Päthur* is a dramatic performance which is put up by *bhānd*s. At folk festivals *bhānd*s perform plays that are called *Bhānd Päthur*. The word *'päthur'* is commonly used in everyday life in the Kashmiri language in expressions like *'päthur karun'*, *'päthur gatshuny'*. The expression *'päthur karun'* means to act, to play some role, to imitate as an actor. *'Päthur kariny'* is now used in the sense of affectation.

Whichever character-type a *Bhānd* may imitate, that character's name suffixed to the term *päthur* becomes the title of the folk play in which his conduct is imitated. For example, we have *Bakarwāl Päthur*[2], *Rāzu Päthur*[3], *Gūry Päthur*[4], etc.

* This article is translated from Chapter 2 of the author's work in Kashmiri titled *Bhānd Natyam*, published in Jammu in 2001. It has been slightly edited for the purpose of publication.The photographs accompanying the translation are of new productions in the Bhānd idiom emerging from a workshop organized by Sangeet Natak Akademi and Natarang, Jammu.—*Ed.*

Folk Play Festivals

Since olden times, whenever religious fairs or festivals have been held at a holy place or shrine in Kashmir, markets have also been held at that spot. Apart from acrobatic shows, and performances by wrestlers, jugglers, and tambourine players, *Bacha Nagmā*[5] dancers, *Hāfiz Nagmā*[6] performers, and *Bhānd Jashan*[7] actors would invariably be part of these fairs and festivals. People would get an opportunity to watch these performances of singing, folk plays and acrobatics in the precincts of temples, shrines, places of pilgrimage, or old mansions. Of these entertainments, only *Bhānd Jashan* would draw large audiences, while at the other performances people would collect in small, scattered groups. Joyous, roaring crowds and colourful costumes have always been features of these festivals and fairs, as colourful as trees in full blossom. While inside the shrines there would be the sombre display of religious faith, outside there would be the hustle and bustle of the marketplace, entertaining songs, music, dance, and of course theatrical performances by the *Bhānd*s. There is a popular Kashmiri saying: 'There is a festival in town and Lame Hassan is sitting at home.' This saying contrasts the seclusion of the infirm Hassan with the convivial atmosphere of the festival, in which the entire population are celebrants. The *Bhānd* theatre was an inseparable part of such festivals.

Tracks and Trails

But who can say when *Bhānd Päthur* actually began? Is *Bhānd Päthur* performed outside Kashmir also? Today, the *Bhānd* theatre can be seen in Kashmir alone. But in the past, apart from Kashmir, *Bhānd*s entertained people in Rajasthan, Gujarat, and northern India in general—mimicking, clowning, making people laugh. Mimicry is still common among *Bhānd*s in Rajasthan. Even one who blows air from the cheeks by striking them with the hand is called a *Bhānd* there. (In Kashmir too, some *Bhānd*s blow air from the cheeks to produce sounds.)

In the past, it is likely that *Bhānd*s travelled from one place to another to perform and display their skills of mimicry. The *Bhānd*s of Panjab are called *Naqqāl* or 'Mimic' today. Like other performers of folk plays, *Bhānd*s too would have put up their shows at nightfall, much in the same way as the Gujarati folk play *Bhavāī* is performed. A 14th-century Gujarati Bhakti poet says in a verse: "*Bhānd Bhavayyā to sārī rāt jāge*" (*Bhānd*s and *Bhavāī* actors remain awake the whole night).

Today, the play-acting *Bhānd* is visible in Kashmir alone. But since how long have the *Bhānd*s been performing plays? How old are their plays? To find answers to such questions, you have to explore sources and delve into history, look for something like the present-day *Päthur* in ancient paintings, or else to rummage through manuscripts and old books for a mention of something resembling such a folk play. In our time, little has been written about the folk festivals, folk dance, folk literature and folk theatre of Kashmir. Some random articles have no doubt been written in the last three decades on these subjects, but these subjects have not been analyzed in depth. There is more of pretentious jargon and less of

discussion in these writings. Therefore, to explore *Bhānd* theatre through published literature—to appreciate its dramatic style, its histrionics, its dance form—and to assess trends of audience response is not an easy task.

In Kashmir, a small *Purāna* named *Nīlamata Purāna* was written in Sanskrit in the 5th century. In this *Purāna*, legends about the settlement of Nāgas, Pishāchas and Aryans in Kashmir after its emergence from the primordial lake Satîsar are recorded. In addition to this, the *Purāna* describes the way life was lived in the past. It also sets down the festive days when dance and theatrical shows should be performed, days on which pilgrimages to various shrines should begin, and days when theatre groups should 'gift' dramatic performances to the common people—a practice that was called *prekshā dāna. Prekshā dāna* also required the audience to make gifts to the actors to compensate them for their effort in performing a play. It is said in the *Purāna* that clothes as well as money should be given to the actors. Donations could be given both in cash and kind. The same practice continues even today in the form of *māngay*, when the *Bhānd*s go from village to village at harvest time to collect grains, lentils, maize, etc. This is a very old custom in Kashmir, though in the past there were fixed days for it.

The *Bhānd* theatre probably did not have a distinct form in ancient times. Had that been the case, the *Nīlamata Purāna* would have certainly mentioned it. But the theatre had both male and female dancers and musicians, the *nat* (actor) and *natiñy* (actress). With the emergence of Persian as the dominant language, the word '*adā*' gained currency, and consequently the term '*adākār*' came to be used.

Archaeological Evidence

In Kashmir we find ruins of ancient monuments, locally called '*Pāñdava lari'* or 'Pāñdava houses', in both the *Kamrāz*[8] (southern) and *Marāz*[9] (northern) parts of the Valley. These are ruins of mansions and temples built by kings in the past. The more important among these ruins can be seen at Mārtand, Avantipur, Paraspor, Tāpar, Nārān Nāg, Pattan and other places. If we look closely at the walls and columns of Mārtand, we find, apart from the images of gods and goddesses and animal figures like elephants, figures of flute players, musicians playing on lyre-like instruments, and actors in various dancing poses. Dancing poses remained the principal subject of sculptural art in Kashmir in different periods.

In the same way, when remains of Buddhist places of worship were discovered during excavations at Harwan, terracotta tiles with floral motifs and human figures (covering the courtyard) and Buddhist images (decorating the walls) were found at the site. One of the tiles has the figure of a dancing girl on it. The dancer is draping a scarf over her head and shoulders, which she is holding in both her hands. One of her legs is raised above the ground with her ankles bearing anklets. She is clearly showing a gesture which we see in *Bacha Nagmā* performance. On another tile, there is the figure of a female musician playing a drum. She is wearing a kind of trousers fastened also at the ankles. Both the heads of the drum are of equal size, like the *dholak*. Yet another tile depicts three musicians, one playing

a pipe, the second a pair of cymbals, and the third playing a pair of kettledrums or *nagārā*. All three instruments provide accompaniment to music and dance.

The Rājataranginī

Kalhana Pandit in his history of Kashmir up to 1149 CE in Sanskrit verse has given an account of the reign of kings of different dynasties in Kashmir from the period of the Mahabharata war. Kalhana wrote this chronicle in eight *tarangas* or parts. The last two parts deal with the times to which he himself belonged, and contain an eyewitness account of contemporary events; this has made them comparatively longer than the other parts. Kalhana's father Champaka was a minister at the court of King Harshadeva; that is why he has been able to give a first-hand description of some of the events and conditions that prevailed during Harshadeva's reign. There are obvious historical errors in some of the opening parts of the chronicle. From Kalhana's chronicle, we come to know the names of some female dancers of the time. We learn that some musicians played on an earthen musical instrument. We also learn that theatre festivals were held and that *svaranay* (*shahnāī*) players accompanied the kings on their tours. Song and dance concerts were held in the *chatuhshālā*s (assembly halls) of royal palaces. However, Kalhana nowhere mentions clearly the kind of folk plays that were performed. Nowhere does he use expressions like folk music or folk theatre. Instead, he uses the terms 'singing', 'dancing', 'theatre', etc. This indicates that the performing arts in that period were not differentiated as they are today. No matter if it were *Bhānd* artists putting up a performance, or skilled female dancers dancing at the court, or *nat*s (actors) creating dramatic representations of divine *līlā* in temples or shrines, their performances constituted *rang* or theatre in that age. Kalhana also indicates that day-long theatre festivals were held in open fields or temple premises. This makes it amply clear that besides professional actors, theatrical performances were presented by folk artists as well. No matter whether the *Bhagat*s or *Nat*s or *Bhând*s performed it, it was all theatre!

Bhāndikā

According to Professor Pushp[10], Abhinavagupta has said at one place in his commentary on Bharata's *Nātyashāstra*, the *Abhinava-Bhārātī*, that "*bhānda nātya*" was performed in Kashmir in which the *Bhānd*s would mimic kings and princes and present humorous skits about them. They would point to their follies and foibles, and humorously criticize them. From this we can make out that even in the tenth century the *Bhānd* theatre or *Bhānd Nātya* was in vogue, and evoking laughter was its main objective. Bharata Muni also refers to a dance form called *Bhāndikā*. This is perhaps what Prof. Pushp regards as *Bhānd Nritya* or *Bhānd* dance, quoting Abhinavagupta. Since the *Bhānd*s' aim was to make people laugh, this dance was probably humorous. Surely, there must have been something in it that made people watch it with interest and enjoy it. If we assume that Bharata's *Nātyashāstra* was written before the second century, when the *Bhānd* dance form *Bhāndikā* was popular, then we must accept that the *Bhānd*s, who performed clowning acts, danced, and made people

laugh, would have been putting up their folk plays before common people in that age. As they did not stage plays for kings or the upper strata of society, scholars did not consider it worthwhile to mention them in their works. But when Sanskrit theatre ceased to exist, folk theatre kept itself alive in one form or another; exhausted one moment, it revived the next to entertain the masses.

When Sultan Zain-ul-Abidin Badshah (1420–1470 CE) celebrated his prince's birthday, the *Bhānd*s presented *Bhānd Jashan,* a dramatic performance, before him. The Badshah's minister Shrivara refers to this *jashan* in his chronicle: "The *Bhānd*s presented their humorous plays. They sported long beards, ground their teeth, glared, knitted their dense eyebrows, and presented humorous tales, true stories and amusing anecdotes." This makes it amply clear that up to the Badshah's time these artists had preserved their folk theatre well. Even today, leaders of *Bhānd* troupes wear beards, and in *Darzu Päthur*, a farcical play about Dard women,[11] the *Māgun* or leader shouts furiously at the jesters, glares at them, grinds his teeth, and cracks his whip.

Päthur or Folk Plays

It is surprising that while Nund Rishi[12] uses the word *'päthur'* in one of his verses and also the word *'rang'* in the sense of theatre at many places, nowhere does he use the word *bhând'*. Lal Ded[13] also does not use the term *'bhānd päthur'* in her verses, though she does use the words *'rang'*, *'nātya'*, and *'mudrā'*. However, whether the words in use were *päthur, rang,* or *nātya*, it is amply clear that performing, watching, and presenting theatre was an integral part of Kashmir's culture; and that *Bhānd Nātyam*, *Bhāndikā*; or *Bhānd Päthur*—in whichever form it existed in the past—was exhibited before audiences and entertained them. In this dramatic form, elements of dancing, acting, singing, and music were all present. It represented contemporary events. Its style was comical. It provided entertainment to people during festivals and fairs, and made them laugh without guile or inhibition. In learned circles, people did not think much of it. That is why it has not been specifically mentioned anywhere.

The Tradition

Bhānd plays are in oral form and have reached us through the oral tradition. They have never been scripted in the manner a modern dramatist writes his dramas. That is why the dialogue in these plays keeps changing in every period. There is a basic outline that is memorized and the play is enacted according to this outline. As a result, sometimes high points of dramatic art are lost. In fact, this was the form these folk plays assumed as they were performed only at fairs where *jashan*s were held. Hereditary *Bhānd*s would tell the actor everything he was required to do to play his role in keeping with the outline. If he was able to realize the potential of this role, then alone he would pursue his occupation as a *Bhānd*; otherwise, he would step out of the arena. However, professional *Bhānd*s would rehearse their roles and come prepared to perform at fairs.

Since the *Bhānd* theatre does not have plays based on historical or mythological stories, romantic tales or folk heroes, it is unrestrained in its expression and loose in structure. It has a purely secular character. It makes no attempt to preserve written drafts perhaps because of its content. If the *Bhānd*s made fun of a person of standing, and there was written evidence of this, it could well have landed them in trouble. However, had any old script been perchance preserved, it would have helped us date the drama, know its older form, and see how language, songs, and other elements were used in it. Such a script may have been an invaluable source of information about this folk theatre.

Strolling Actors

A little more than a hundred years ago, Walter R. Lawrence was the Settlement Commissioner in Kashmir. He wrote a book in English, *The Valley of Kashmir*, in which besides giving a detailed account of conditions prevailing in Kashmir, and also its culture and civilization, he captured patterns of everyday life in the Valley. On page 256 of this book, he says: "I have seen the best companies in Kashmir, though perhaps the best—the Bhaggats of Syebug—died off in the famine of 1877. . . The Bhaggats portray village life in a most vivid manner."[14] He says that Maharaja Gulab Singh acquired a very intimate knowledge of village administration from the Bhaggats' performances, particularly about the methods of the *patwārī*, the village accountant, and the "*lambardār*".[15] "The plot is always the same", Lawrence says. Referring to one particular play, he says that an aggrieved villager who brings his grievance to the Rājā is at first "very loud and noisy in his complaints". To redress the injustice done to him, the Rājā "seizes on the *patwārī* and the *lambardār* and calls for the village account". The oppressed victim is happy that he will now get justice. But, perversely, the Rājā has the *wazīr*, *patwārī* and others severely flog the innocent victim.[16] Lawrence says that scenes of village life are also depicted in these folk plays, one favourite among the people being a play which shows the "sowing, plucking and spinning of cotton". In the words of Lawrence, the *Bhaggats* "relieve the sadness of village life in Kashmir". [17]

From the above details given by Lawrence, we come to know that he had himself seen various plays performed by *Bhānd*s at different places in the Valley before 1889. That is how he could say that the *Bhānd*s of Syebug died in the famine of 1877. He saw the best parties of *Bhaggat*s, but did not identify these parties or villages. He has also not mentioned the name of any play, though from the description he has given we could say that one play he is talking about may have been *Rāja Päthur,* imitating the king. The *Bhānd*s, Lawrence says, enact scenes of village life as they themselves are village artists. He says a favourite play in the *Bhānd*s' repertoire represents the entire process from sowing of cotton to the weaving of cloth; however, he does not give us the name of the play. Today, the *Bhānd*s present this sequence in the form of a dance as they play on the *svaranay* (*shahnāī*); it is an important part of the *Bata Päthur*[18] or *Buhury Päthur*[19]. When Lawrence says that "the *Bhaggat*s relieve the sadness of village life", he attests to the fact that the plays performed

by the *Bhaggat*s were full of humour and evoked laughter. Otherwise, there is nothing in village life but gloom.

Writes Lawrence about the *Bhānd*s:

> The minstrels of Kashmir (Bhaggat or Bānd) can be recognized by their long black hair . . . , and . . . they are . . . a peculiar people so far as marriage goes[.T]hey sometimes recruit their companies by enlisting a villager. They combine the profession of singing and acting with that of begging, and are great wanderers, travelling down to the Panjab where they perform to Kashmiri audiences. With the curious exception of the Akangam [Akingam] company, which is formed of Pandits, the Bhaggats are all Musalmāns. They are much in request at marriage feasts, and at harvest time they move about the country, and in a year of good harvests will make a fair living on the presents of the villagers. Their orchestra usually consists of four fiddles (*sārangī*s) with a drum in the centre, or of clarionets (*shahnāī*s) and drums, but the company often contains twenty members or more. Their wardrobe is frequently of great value, and several companies which I have met are said to have dresses and properties worth more than Rs 2,000. Their acting is excellent and their songs are often very pretty. They are clever at improvisation and are fearless as to its results. They have songs in Kashmiri, Persian and Panjabi, but the Kashmiri songs are the only ones which I have heard. The story of the Akangām Bhaggats is peculiar.[20]

Brahmin Bhānds

The Brahmins consider acting to be degrading and regard the *Bhānd*s of Akingam with contempt. But the Brahmin players of of Akingam say that they took to the stage by the express order of the goddess *Devī*. Legend says that many years ago the goddess appeared before the chief of the Pandits of Akingam and, placing a *sārangī* in his hands, said: "Play upon this *sārangī*." He refused, but the goddess persisted. He took up the bow and played on the *sārangī*, and felt as if he was playing heavenly music. The goddess said to him: "Now go to the deodar forests of Akingam and show devotion to me by playing on this fiddle." He and his children did as instructed for some years, but they could not continue to play the *sârangî* for long against the custom of their caste. So the chief finally gave up playing the *sārangī*. At this he was stricken by blindness. Leaving the village, he wandered over to the Lidder valley. Then the goddess appeared to the magistrate of that area in a dream and asked him to take the Pandit back to Akingam. On returning to his village, his eyesight was restored. Since that day, he and his descendants have played the *sārangī* without further protest. These Pandit *Bhānd*s do not send their children to school as they believe that the goddess would be angry if they did so, and their children would die.[21]

> The *Bhaggat*s are very pleasant people and their mirth and good humour form a cheerful contrast to the gloom of the Kashmiri peasant. They acknowledge only two leaders or Sardars who arrange the circuits [of their tours to other villages]. They have a peculiar argot (*phirakath*) which they use among themselves and employ in stage directions.[22]

Lawrence is unbiased and objective in the above observations. He was a foreigner, a native

of Britain, so he reported exactly what he saw of the *Bhānd*s. In light of his description, we can say that a hundred years ago, leaders of *Bhānd* troupes wore long hair. They travelled to every part of Kashmir; outside Kashmir, they went as far as Shimla in east Punjab (now Himachal Pradesh), where they exhibited their dances, songs and plays. They were in great demand at marriages and other festive occasions. They performed *Bacha Nagmā* and *Chhakrī*[23] also. For *Chhakrī* four *sārangī*s are ideally required. The *svaranay* (*shahnāī*) serves to provide background music in *Bhānd* theatre.

The *Bhānd*s would also ask for alms. Taking along a *bachā* or boy dancer with them, they would travel from village to village or walk the streets of the city, playing on the *svaranay* or performing *Bacha Nagmā*, receiving presents in cash or kind. On *Eid* or *Navreh*[24], they would visit shrines, and go from house to house entertaining people with their singing. If they saw a talented *bachā* or musician outside their tribe, they would take him along as well. Every *Bhānd* party consisted of ten actors, comedians, dancing boys and musicians. Except for the Brahmin *Bhānd*s of Akingam, all other *Bhānd*s and *Bhaggat*s were Muslim. At harvest time, they would go out to collect grains. They are reported to have had two leaders. One of them would arrange their tours, but what the other did is not clear. Lawrence has described them as a "very pleasant people" because their aim was to make people laugh. The buffoon is of course a gossip-monger; that is why Lawrence has said that they relieve the gloom of village life with their plays, singing and buffoonery.

Using argot or code language was a compulsion for them. It is not *Bhānd*s alone who use such language; people belonging to other trades also talk among themselves in their own argot. For instance, it is common for carpenters, goldsmiths and cobblers to speak to each other in a coded language. In Kashmir, butchers also employ a kind of code language, or code words, in their trade talk. In fact, this is a vestige of colonial subjugation. When a man was compelled to hide the truth, he couldn't talk openly. His speech was curbed by self-interest and fear. The *Bhānd*s speak plain Kashmiri at home, or among common people, but in public assemblies, at marriages, or in the presence of strangers they still speak a coded language. In the past, *Bhānd*s were not looked upon with respect in Kashmiri society. At wedding feasts, basket-makers and *Bhānd*s were served after the guests had eaten. And when they felt faint with hunger, they would talk to each other in their coded language, so that even if someone heard them he would not understand what they were saying.

Since Lawrence has praised the *Bhānd*s of Syebug highly, it will not be irrelevant to point out that no *Bhānd* lives in Syebug today, nor does anyone there want to pursue the *Bhānd*'s profession. Some people there do say they had a few props or costumes like the lion mask or gowns, but they sold them off to other *Bhānd*s. Hence, there is truth in Lawrence's statement that the skilled *Bhānd*s who lived there fell victim to the plague of 1877. Death devours both—artists as well as their art!

One thing that is very clear is that at one time Hindu *Bhānd*s lived in Akingam (Muharpur). They were also skilled in Kashmiri music and performed folk plays. In Akingam, a little above the lower slopes of the mountain, is the temple of Shivā Devī. Many years ago, there

was an open forest there where a sacred pine tree stood. This was regarded as a manifestation of the goddess Shivâ, and a fair was held there on the Ram Navami day. Even now a fair is held there every year. It was on this day that *Bhānd*s would present their dramatic performances at the spot. These Hindu *Bhānd*s were devotees of the goddess and it was necessary for them to perform a *jashan* on that day. The Muslim *Bhānd*s and *Bhaggat*s of Akingam would also join them in holding these dramatic performances. The Hindu *Bhānd*s pursued their occupation up to 1947, but later they gave it up for social reasons. Other Kashmiri Hindus started looking down upon them as they regarded their profession as degraded. These Hindu *Bhānd*s were proficient in singing Persian and Kashmiri songs and also in acting and dancing. They were also very skilled in playing musical instruments like the *sārangī* and the *sitār*. Even after they had stopped performing, they would go out to to collect alms at harvest time, and Hindu and Muslim landlords as well as common village people would gladly offer them grain. But by the 1970s, they had altogether given up this traditional occupation.

Gulab Ram

Among these Hindu *Bhānd*s was a famous *bacha*, a dancing boy named Gulab Ram, popularly known as 'Guly Bacha'. Before *Hāfiz Nagmā* went out of vogue, he was among the top dancers of Kashmir. He was also an accomplished singer of folk songs, *vākh*s[25], *vatsan*s[26], *na'at*s[27], Persian songs, and also *līlā*s or devotional songs. He was the first among the dancing boys of Kashmir to start singing Urdu songs. He would dance to Kashmiri music and surpass many a celebrated *Hāfizā*. He was the first to sing the song '*Mohammad badā shān wālā nabī hai*'. Gulab Ram died young. There are many stories about him current in the Brang Kutahār area of Anantnag district. He had become a legend as a singer and dancer. It is said that when he passed away and his body was taken to the bank of the Bringī stream for cremation, a severe storm broke out after the pyre was lit and the men attending the funeral fled from the spot. When they were near their village, they met some men from another village who had just crossed the Bringī stream. The men from the neighbouring village asked them, "Where have you been?" "We are returning after cremating Guly Bacha", they replied. The men from the other village were surprised and said, "Are you sure? We just saw him going towards Akingam." It is said that Guly Bacha used to visit a faqir and sing before him. This faqir had said to him: "Guly Bacha, you will never be burnt in fire." Maybe this legend was propagated to make Gulab Ram a folk hero.

The Basket-makers of Bhāndpur

At present *Bhānd*s live at different places in Kashmir. In some villages they have separate localities of their own called Bhândpur. Besides doing theatre, they are also professional wicker-basket-makers weaving large and small baskets and making *kāngrī*s[28]. In fact, basket-weaving is the craft that keeps them occupied in their homes when there is a break in the marriage season or when no fairs or festivals are being held. After all, they have to do some

work in order to survive. Fetching willow branches from the forest, washing them, spreading them out in the sun to dry, scraping them and colouring them, buying earthen fire-pots from potters and weaving *kāngrīs*—that is the work they do to earn extra income. In the past some *Bhānd*s, in particular the *Māgun*[29], the leader, would often take some nicely made *kāngrīs* with him on tours and on festival days go around the houses of people of substance in a village, offering them as presents and getting a good *bakhshīsh* from a *jāgīrdār*[30] or *lambardār*[31]. Some jesters and musicians would likewise make their offerings at the houses of landlords or rich people in the village and receive presents at harvest time. In this manner, a mutual give-and-take has been going on between landowners and *Bhānd* artists for generations. Besides making baskets, *Bhānd*s also work as cultivators, farm labourers, bone-setters, etc., to make a living. Driving *tongā*s, hawking, or working as labourers in towns and cities also sustains them out of season. Very few *Bhānd*s have sufficient agricultural land to grow food for their families round the year.

Overall, *Bhānd*s belong to two categories. The first category comprises those *Bhānd*s who perform folk plays, who play the *svaranay,* or sing and dance to the rhythm of the drum or pipe. In the winter months, they weave baskets. As Lawrence says, in former times they used to wear long hair. Actually, it was the *bachā*s or boy dancers who would sport long hair like women. They would dance wearing a *peshwāz*. The Hindu *Bhānd*s of Muharpur till recently had photographs of some boy dancers with them. These '*bachā*s' would wear long hair from the age of fifteen to twenty years. But that is not the case today. Now wigs are available to performers to be used in a play.

There is no district or *tehsīl* in Kashmir Valley which has no village that does not have a few *Bhānd* households. The principal villages where the *Bhānds* live are Bidar, Muharpur, Badasgam, Akingam, Shangas, Gond, Imam Sahib, Balapur (Takiya), Phirsal, Romuhand Sir and Kanaligund in Anantnag and Pulwama districts; Yachhgam, Wathora, Banaz, Hanjigund, and Bambrad in Srinagar and Badgam districts; and Palhalan, Bumay Lolpur, Tilgam, Hatamula, Dragmula, Karahom and Gulgam in Baramulla district. In all, there would be about eighty villages where *Bhānd*s are scattered. In Kashmir Valley, the places where *Bhānd*s still hold their dramatic performances are now limited to only some fifteen villages. Today, they work in the manner of theatre groups. Many parties have got their names registered according to their own charters and are now performing modern drama in addition to the *Bhānd* theatre. They now have more Presidents or Secretaries of *Bhānd* troupes than the old *Māgun*s. In the old days *Bhānd*s used to live from hand to mouth, but now they put up a play after taking a decision on the contract offered. In the past, they would go around with the bridegroom after receiving advances during weddings. Playing the *svaranay*, they would be in the forefront of the bridegroom's marriage procession. They would also play the *svaranay* when the bride was taken to the litter to be carried to the house of her parents-in-law. But there are no takers for such assignments now. The fact is, the *Bhānd* profession is now dying out.

Gaddha Singh

The village Mattan in Anantnag has a population of Sikhs together with other religious denominations. A famous Sikh singer and actor called Gaddha Singh used to live there. Right from his childhood he was fond of singing and acting. He would move about with *Bhānd*s and later in his capacity as *Māgun* he would play the roles of king, *Āshaq Gosoñy*[32], etc., in folk plays with great success. He would take part in dancing too, besides fencing and sword-play. His beard and long hair would come in handy in his roles. Some Sikhs did not like his acting as a *Bhānd* and complained to their religious leaders. On the basis of this complaint, a *Bhaiji* (Sikh religious leader) came to Mattan all the way from Poonch and personally launched an investigation into Gaddha Sngh's conduct. He saw Gaddha Singh taking part in a folk play, playing the role of *Āshaq Gosoñy*. When he found him playing the role of *Āshaq Gosoñy* and singing religious verses from the *Granth Sahib* besides reciting *vākh*s (verses of the Kashmiri saint-poetess Lal Ded) and *shruk*s (verses of the saint-poet Nund Rishi), the *Bhaiji* was so impressed that he rejected the complaint made against the actor. Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad, the then Prime Minister of Kashmir, was also impressed when he watched him dancing and began to patronize him.

The Bhānd Theatre Today

Folk theatre artists of different religious affiliations have worked as *Bhānd*s from time to time and kept this folk-art form alive, but today in Kashmir all the artists are Muslim. Some of them are giving up the profession now, but others are sticking to it. Nobody can say how long this theatre will survive.

When I had an opportunity to investigate the *Bhānd* theatre, I often asked leaders of *Bhānd* troupes which plays they were currently performing. They mentioned the names of the following folk plays: *Darzu Päthur,* a play impersonating Dard women; *Rāza Päthur,* a play imitating kings; *Rāja Päthur*, which is a variant of *Rāza Päthur; Buhury Päthur,* a play imitating the *Buhur* or vendor of drugs, spices, and groceries; *Bata Päthur,* a play imitating Kashmiri Pandits; *Wātal Päthur,* a play imitating the cobbler; *Āramy Päthur,* a play about vegetable farmers; *Tilwān Päthur,* a farcical folk play about the oil presser; *Vūntu Päthur,* a farce based on the camel; *Bota Päthur,* a folk play imitating Ladakhis; *Chīnī Päthur,* a play caricaturing the Chinese; *Mughal Päthur,* a play imitating the Mughals; *Mirzāy Päthur,* a play imitating the Mirzāis, *Gosoñy Päthur,* a play imitating mendicants; *Bisni Päthur,* a play about the Bisnî sect; *Angrez Päthur,* a play caricaturing Englishmen; *Bakarwāl Päthur,* a play imitating the Bakarwāls; *Shikārgāh Päthur,* a farcical play revolving around a hunting scene; *Gady Päthur*, a play imitating the Gaddis; and *Hänz Päthur,* a play imitating Kashmiri boatmen.

However, this is just a list of names. According to Lawrence, "the plays performed by the *Bhānds* are all similar. Sometimes they show the same play under different names." There was a time when they knew a lot of mimicry, but now they have forgotten much of it. They have lost a lot because of their own failings, and because of swift changes in political as

well as social conditions. For example, in ancient times, some famous Chinese travellers and ambassadors had come to Kashmir. Chan Kun was a minister of King Lalitaditya. Hiuen Tsang[33] stayed in Buddhist monasteries in Kashmir for two years, where he studied and translated religious books. Similarly, Ou Kong also came to Kashmir. Some *Bhānd*s of that time may have imitated them and prepared a play which was named *Chīnī Päthur*. The play did not survive but its memory remained. Therefore,while surveying present-day *Bhānd* theatre, it is best to go by personal observation, and not the names of plays in the artists' repertoire. The plays that I have myself seen and identified are as follows:

Darzu Päthur; *Rāja Päthur* (which is also known as *Rāza Päthur*); *Gosoñy Päthur, Wātal Päthur; Angrez Päthur; Shikārgāh Päthur* (which was earlier known as *Suha Päthur* as well); *Bata* or *Buhury Päthur* (basically the same play shown under two names); and *Āramy Päthur*. In *Wūnta Päthur* the players take the shape of a camel and in *Tilwān Päthur* an oil-press is brought on the stage. *Hänz Päthur* is a small play. The other plays exist in name only. The *Mogul* and *Mirzäy Päthur* were also basically the same play, in which many Persian dialogues were incorporated. Most parts of the plays that I saw in the 1970s are not enacted today. Of dancing, very little has remained, and the music is being forgotten.

Bhānd Baggage

The *Bhānd*s would take great care of their costumes and other belongings. They would get *chogā*s (gowns) from wealthy and highly placed people. Usually they would keep their clothes and costumes, silken turbans, caps, *peshwāz*es (long coats), *lūngy*s (sashes)[34], bed-sheets, etc., in bundles. The *Bhānd*s of Dragmula had a very old *angrakhā* with them and the *Bhānd*s of Wāthore possessed an equally old *dhussā* (fine blanket). The *Bhānds* of Hänzgund had the largest number of *peshwāz*es, *chogā*s, and *khesh*es (shawls) among all troupes that I have known. These properties have diminished over the years. The *Bhānd*s of Akingam, and also the *Bhānd*s of Takiya Imam Sahib, Wathore and Bumai have the properties needed for the *Shikārgāh* play, which include deer masks and horse and lion heads. Even today, carpenters make wooden deer masks at these places. However, some years back, the *Bhānd*s of Wathore purchased several properties of this kind from the wife of a *Bhānd* of Syebug. In the same way, the *Bhānd*s of Akingam purchased a tiger mask from the *Bhānd*s of Romuh. Deer and horse masks are made of wood but tiger masks are also made of *papier mâché* (besides wood). The *Bhānd* baggage includes musical instruments. The *svaranay*, drum, and trumpet are instruments that generally belong to the players themselves. Bamboo sticks, anklets, tambourines, tridents, wigs (particularly those of the mendicant in *Gosoñy Päthur*), are kept with the *Māgun*. Formerly, *Bhānd*s were not in the habit of wearing ironed costumes, nor did they care to check before acting whether the buttons or collar-strings on the garments were in place. All this was of little value to them. But now times hae changed, and some players are quite dress-conscious; some troupes store their costumes in trunks.

Relief

During Dogra rule, *Bhānd*s and *Bhagat*s were exempt from forced labour and royal taxes. The *Bhānd*s of Dragmula still have a stamped document with them in which the Maharaja orders that *Bhānd*s should not be asked to pay "*chūllah* (hearth) tax" and "lamp-oil tax".

Bhānds/Bhagats

*Bhānd*s are also known as *Bhagat*s—an alternative name for the profession. In the old days, they would hold dramatic performances throughout North India, staging *Bhagavat Lilā* or dramatic representations of stories related to the Lord's divine play. But when they had no patronage, they would present pure entertainment such as mimicry shows or folk plays. Whenever a fair was held at a place of worship, *Bhagat*s would go there and present episodes of *Bhagavat Lilā*. There were different types of Bhagats. Some would sing devotional songs only, while some would display their acting skills as well. Some would entertain with mimicry as well as *Bhagavat Līlā* shows. In their plays of mimicry, *Bhagat*s would entertain audiences by presenting short anecdotes about man-woman relationship; they would also mimic moneylenders, tyrants, and hypocrites. The *Bhagats* did not enjoy people's patronage for long and thus several traditions of folk theatre branched out of it in North India. In Kashmir, this movement continued in the form of *Bhānd Jashan*. *Bhagat*s were to be seen in Jammu, Himachal Pradesh, and Uttar Pradesh too, but now their numbers have declined. One reason for this is the open use of obscene and sexually explicit language by the players. For some time, common people found this enjoyable, but as society became more sophisticated, the elite expressed their distaste for vulgarity and thus the Bhagats lost patronage. When fairs are held at the villages of Bidar, Waden Walgam, Ghouhan and Souf Shali, the local *Bhānds* not only hold a *jashan* but also put on a joint performance of what is known as '*Bhānd Tsok*'—an ensemble of four song and drama shows. The *Bhānds* of Akingam, Hirpur, Bidar, Badasgam, and Gondapore go there. In the same way, when a festival is held at Dragmula at the shrine of Shah Wali, *Bhānd*s from Hatamula, Kulgam, Karbamah, and Kaimuh come to participate and present *jashan* and dance there as an offering of faith. Similarly, *Bhānd* artists living in other villages hold performances in villages in their vicinity on occasions of a like nature.

'*Bhagat*' comes from the Sanskrit '*bhakta*'—a devotee of God, a devout person, worshipper or seeker. So a *Bhagat*'s/*Bhānd*'s objective is not merely to entertain but also to seek God as a practitioner of theatrical art. He must entertain his patrons in such a manner that everyone feels blessed.

Päthur

The word '*päthur*' has several meanings. It is used in Kashmiri for drama or play. When children play with dolls and marry bride and groom, it is also regarded as a kind of *päthur* or drama. It is pure make-believe, child's play, an imitation of life.

Since '*Bhānd Päthur*' and '*Bhānd Jashan*' are almost synonymous, they sometimes

create confusion. In former times, more than one play was shown during a festival or fair, and that is why it was called *jashan*. It was a mixed display of music, dance, mimicry and acting, and common people called it *jashan*, a festival. If we look at the job of the *Bhānd*— acting, music, mimicry, etc.— and identify its structural elements, then, keeping apart the musical part of the entertainment, we could call the dramatic part 'pure' drama.

Having recognized the components of the *päthur* or folk play, we could now examine its form. Generally, in the world of drama, every play tells some story in a particular style, different as each style may be from the other. But in *Bhānd Päthur,* there is no such thing as a story or plot. What is important here is to bring out some trait of character with humour, using mimicry, or to present a caricature. The very purpose of *Bhānd Päthur* is to evoke laughter. Laughter is the main *rasa* which this genre seeks to generate to entertain people in its own peculiar way. The more intelligent, experienced and skilled an actor is, the more laughter he will bring forth.

So when we talk of *Bhānd Päthur*, we have to keep in mind the fact that it is a play which is very different from European-style drama. Even if there is sorrow to be shown here, it will be shown in a manner that will evoke laughter. We also cannot expect to see any historical or semi-historical event presented in *Bhānd Päthur* plays. From that point of view, the appeal of the *Bhānd* theatre is limited. The genre deals only in that which is humorous, nay comical, excluding the range of sentiments associated with other forms of traditional theatre, such as bravery, strength, horror, wonder, eroticism or love, sorrow, zeal, courageousness, hatred, or amazement. It is immersed in only one sentiment and that is *hāsya* or laughter. The comic element present in it is of three types: physical, dress-related, and verbal. *Bhānd Päthur* is based on episodes that bring forth laughter from these causes, and nothing beyond that. There is no set or scenery in this theatrical form or anything in the nature of *nepathya* or backstage.Everything happens right before the audience. If a jester has to play another role, he changes his costume in the presence of the audience or else plays the second role in the same dress. There is no such thing as a greenroom. This is a folk theatre— for the people, among the people—in which acting skill is all-important, but only from one point of view—creating laughter. That is how *Bhānd Päthur* has set its limits for itself.

Songs

If we take a look at the *Bhānd* theatre as it is today, we do not find any song or poem (barring one or two) which belongs exclusively to a particular play. The *Bhānd*s sing any *rov*[35] song they like, chant any snatch of *wanavun*[36] or popular song. There have been poets among the *Bhānd*s too, but they have not enriched *Bhānd* theatre with their poetry. A song that I happen to have found in *Bata Päthur* has a line or two on people of different professions. For example:

> The cook has a son tall as a tree
> His feet on the ground he does not set

He gobbled *goshtābā*[37] and his throat he burnt
O, how many tears the cook's wife shed.

Singing and music are an important part of a folk play; indeed, they are the life-blood of every folk theatre of the country. But to sing you must have lyrics—poems, *shruk*s, *vākh*s, snatches of short lyrics, *rov* songs, etc. In *Bhānd Päthur*, generally, it is only common folk songs or humorous ditties that are sung. In *Gosoñy Päthur*, however, *chhumbāls*[38] as well as Lal Ded's *vākh*s and Sheikh Nur-ud-Din's *shruk*s are sung. From the manner in which the *Bhānd*s of Dragmula sang the *chhumbāl*s in the past, it would appear that these were verses from the *Chhummā Sampradāya*[39] or Punjabi *shabad*s from the *Granth Sāhib*. If some old *Bhānd* is still singing them, one should collect these *chhumbāl*s from him and come to some definite conclusion about their sources after due analysis. *Chhumbāl*s are sung in the same rhythm as *vākh*s and *shruk*s. Other songs are sung extempore as a *Bhānd* player remembers them. There being no constraint on choice of song, *Bhānd* theatre has lost many in course of time. Furthermore, a song that is composed keeps changing over a period of time.

Preservation and Loss

As *Bhānds* are seldom restrained by artistic convention, they have been able to preserve little of their art except their mimicry and some of their music. They have not added anything to their theatre. There was a time when many *Bhānd* artists gave dance performances that impressed a visitor like Walter Lawrence. But in the last hundred years they have exhausted themselves. A few old masters may still know how to perform their graceful dance. But such experienced artists are dying out, and what is left of the dance is only a step or two of *d(h)amālī*[40], *Bacha Nagmā*, and a forward and backward movement to the rhythm of *rov* songs. The songs that the *Bhānd*s sing today are all borrowed songs. Therefore, if there is a song in the play *Wātal Päthur*, it has been possibly taken from the tale of Wuzrāmāl. The song, '*Nābady Wātaliny kūr dyka bajī / Vantu latī mänz kitsh lajīye*' ('O' fortunate daughter of Nābad Wātal / Say how nicely your hands have been decorated with henna'), is such a borrowing. Forgetting their own dancing postures and steps, the *Bhānds* are today imitating dances in popular films. If this trend continues, there will be nothing of the original form of dance left in the *Bhānd* theatre.

Forms and Appearances

The *Bhānd* performer could assume multiple roles in this popular entertainment—as actor, singer, and dancer—in different audience contexts. Thus having sung till midnight, the *bacha* or boy dancer could then act in a *Bhānd* play. He would play, for instance, the washerwoman, collecting clothes, washing them, ironing them, folding them, and then arranging them neatly in piles and going from one home to another to deliver them to clients. He would sing and dance as he acted this role. He might sing the song '*Malī-malī sāban tu chhalī doby bāye, chhalī doby bāye*' ('Apply soap, O washerwoman, and wash the

clothes.'). In this song there are allusions to the river Vitasta or Jhelum. (The Vitasta flows from Verinag, irrigating Kashmir. That is why in this song the names of various places on the river are mentioned). Or else, impersonating a faqir, a Kashmiri Pandit girl, or some other character, the actor would make people laugh by his mono-acting. (Such acting is featured particularly at the *mehndī-rāt* ceremony in a wedding.) Before the present-day *Bacha Nagmā*, it was the *Bhānd* who would act as the *Chhakrī* singer and present the *Bacha Nagmā* performance as well. That is how the boy dancer became skilled in mono-acting. Gulab Ram carried this tradition further and so did Gopi Nath Bachā.

If we were to look closely at *Bhānd Päthur*, we would find that it mostly highlights one character—be it the *Bakarwāl* or *Bata*. Different aspects of the same character are presented by individual actors. But there are exceptions such as the play *Wātal Päthur*, representing a group of Kashmiri Pandits going on pilgrimage. Here, Nābady Wātul is at first alone, but is joined by *Shupy Wātal*[41], *Baräty Wātal*, some cobblers, cooks, etc. Yet, the play is presented by a single actor who acts as milkman, faqir, or woman at the same time. He develops each character, crafts the dialogue, sings the songs, and keeping up the humour tries to show each character's peculiarities, follies, ignorance, and other failings in the time-honoured style of the drama. Wearing a woman's dress, the *Bhānd* actor presents *'Zanāna Päthur'* (a play on women) and imitates the actions of a village woman who is going for the first time from a village to the city. She has an imaginary servant going with her to whom she is talking, and holds a small bundle in her lap which looks as thugh it contained a small baby she is feeding from time to time. To stop it from crying, she repeatedly says "*Balāyi lagay*" ('May your misfortunes be upon me!'). As it is the first time she has come to the city from her village, she is struck with awe and wonder when she sees a lorry, a motor car, wide, tarred roads, and the noise of the crowds as she moves on talking to her servant. In the same manner, she keeps talking with other imaginary characters. These exchanges establish a theatrical situation in which she has lost her way in the city, is separated from her servant, and her baby is having fever. She is pursued in succession by a gambler, a drunkard, a carriage driver, and a rogue, but keeps walking as she talks to them with her face veiled with her sleeve. Such acting makes the viewer feel he is watching something akin to the Sanskrit dramatic form *bhān*.

Bhānd actors seldom perform such plays now. Since the time the *Yuva Vānī* channel became popular on the radio and humorous songs began to be aired on it, *Bhānd Päthur* actors and *bachā* dancers have gone over to the medium. They started including episodes featuring lovers' complaints in their presentations in which there was less of acting and more of singing which has assumed greater importance. In the kind of single-actor plays I have earlier referred to, Gopinath of Anantnag achieved high excellence. I have not seen an actor as good as him in Kashmir. The boy dancers were generally very good singers, but Gopinath excelled in acting. He was such an accomplished actor that if he wanted the audience to laugh it would laugh with him, and if he wanted it to cry he would bring tears to

A scene from the play *Chaat-Kapat* written and directed by Fayaz Ahmed Bhat, presented by Kashmir Bhand Theatre at Momin Sahab, Pulwama (2011).

Chaat-Kapat, Momin Sahab, Pulwama (2011).

Photographs: Natarang, Jammu

From *Hanga-te-Manga* written and directed by Shah-e-Jahan Ahmed Bhagat, presented by National Bhand Theatre at Hayatpora, Budgam (2011).

Hanga-te-Manga, Hayatpora, Budgam (2011).

From *Tsalgoom* written by Muneer Ahmed, directed by Muhammad Sadiq, presented by Baba Reshi Folk Theatre at Kowaasa, Budgam (2011).

From *Naav-Laj-Danji* written and directed by Manzoor Ahmad Bhat, presented by Dilkash Folk Theatre at Shatwaari Nagri, Kupwara.

From *Anigaat* written and directed by Feroz Ahmed Bhat, presented by Manasbal Folk Theatre at Nayed Khai, Bandipora 2011).

From *Anigaat*, Nayed Khai, Bandipora (2011).

From *Kak Volukh Qabri* written and directed by Abdul Rashid Bhat, presented by Bomai Luk Theatre at Delina, Baramulla *(2011)*.

their eyes. There were a few other actors like him in the past, such as Jia Lal (Jia Bacha), Ved Lal (Ved Bacha), Mohi-ud-din Gagam, Abdul Ghani Rather (Ghani Trali), and Ghaffar Lojur.

Many writers have surmised that *Bacha Nagmā* evolved in the Afghan or Mughal era, but nobody has paid any attention to the fact that the professional *Chhakrī* singers of today came to be known only in the twentieth century, particularly when Radio Kashmir came into existence. Before that period, it was the dancing boys who sang *Chhakrī* songs. This has been confirmed by Walter Lawrence. These boy dancers wore long hair like women. Guly Bacha (Gulab Ram) of Moharpur was an expert in presenting one-actor plays apart from dancing to Kashmiri music. But *Bhānd*s have begun to forget this kind of acting now.

COSTUME

Costume is of great importance in folk plays as well as classical drama. Looking at the dress of a character, one can determine his status, religion, age, origin, and profession. Besides dress, the properties that a character uses also tell us much about him. When a winnowing-tray-maker (*shupy wātul*) comes on the stage, he would be seen carrying a number of trays and the instruments to repair and decorate them. A glance at the man would tell us that he is a winnowing-tray-maker. He could just be wearing a *salwār* and shirt, but the objects he carries would identify his profession. The costumes that are used in *Bhānd Päthur* are described in the following paragraphs.

The Peshwāz

This is a close-fitting coat from the midriff to the neck. Below the waist, the *peshwāz* is like a *lehngā* which reaches down to the feet. At the waist, it has a band to gather the pleats so that it spreads out like a skirt as the actor performs a dance. Up to the waist, it is like a round-collared, close-fronted jacket. Richly embroidered in gold, this tunic is made of chintz or other cloth which swirls when lifted by a puff of air. In *Bhānd* theatrical performances it is often *bachās* or boy dancers and *daruz*es (young boys dressed like Dard women) who wear the *peshwāz*, though players acting as kings (as in *Rāja Päthur*) or men of high position (as in *Mughal Päthur*) also wear it under their gowns, as also the *Māgun*. Today, the *peshwāz* is a two-part garment comprising a top called *cholī* and a lower garment called *lehngā*. The *cholī* is long-sleeved, keeping the climate of Kashmir in view. It has some fastening or buttons on the front and fully covers the belly. It has many variations. A dress resembling the *peshwāz* was worn by female dancers in Iran and a similar dress was common in princely states in Kashmir (besides Rajasthan, Punjab, Haryana and Himachal Pradesh). Mughal kings also adopted this garment; a silken or muslin cover was added to it, which was worn over the *peshwāz* specially by women.

During the reign of the Gupta dynasty in India, it was customary to wear a garment called *ghāgrī*. Today this is called *ghāgrā*. It is a loose garment running from the navel to the

ankles. It has a waist with a drawstring running through a sheath. It appears that a small round-necked coat with long, narrow sleeves was added to the *ghāgrā* and was called *peshwāz*.

The Chogā

This is shaped like a coat but is a little longer. Often it is made of fine cloth like brocade or *pashmīnā*, with an inner lining. Worn in dancing roles, a shining *chogā* lends grace to a *Bhānd Päthur* performance. The garment is of ancient origin: Emperor Kanishka's statue in the Mathura Museum shows him wearing a *chogā* over a garment resembling *peshwāz*. *Chogā*s are of different kinds. In countries surrounding Kashmir, like Tajikistan or Iran, it is customary to wear *chogās* even now. The *chogās* that some *Bhānd*s have in their possession do not appear to be more than one hundred and fifty years old. They seem to belong to the days of Dogra rule in Kashmir. Although some *Bhānd*s boast that their *chogā*s were given to them by the King of Arabia, they do not answer questions as to who that king was and when he came to Kashmir. The old custom of wearing a fur coat called *postīn* has also existed in Kashmir, but the *Bhānd*s do not wear it.

The Angarakhā

The *angarakhā*, no longer in use today, was a loose garment that would cover the arms as well as the body. It was a knee-length garment gathered in pleats over the belly. In Kashmir, the *angarakhā* was quilted to keep the body warm. In ancient times it was called *antarīya*. The *angarakhā* was of many kinds; it could be short in length, or with short sleeves. *Bhānd*s do not wear an *angarakhā* now as it is out of vogue. In the past, it was used to play *Gosoñy Päthur* and *Bata Päthur*. It was shaped like the Ladakhi *gonchā*. The old Kashmiri Pandit *pheran*s had tight and long sleeves like the *angarakhā*.

The Turban

The custom of wearing a turban is thousands of years old. Different styles of tying the turban have been prevalent in different ages. Today, *Bhānd*s wear turbans in the style that was prevalent in the time of the Dogras. The *svaranay* players and musicians wear white muslin turbans and on some occasions coloured turbans. In olden times some people wore round turbans shaped like cheese.

The Pheran

The *pheran* is a common dress of the Kashmiris which they wear all the year round. The musicians, such as *svaranay*-players, generally play music for the *Bhānd Jashan* wearing *pheran*s. Most of them wear cotton *pheran*s, which are of different, and mostly sober colours. These days, *bachā*s or boy dancers act as Dard women wearing ladies' *pheran*s.

The Salwār

The *salwār* is a pair of wide pyjamas narrowing at the ankles. The *Bhānd* artists too wear it.

The *salwār* is worn with the *kurtā* or shirt. Today, fashionable young *Bhānd*s, even if they are musicians, move about in trousers also, wearing them even under their *peshwāz*. While performing as jesters, they roll up the legs and pull them upwards. The *salwār* is originally a garment worn in Afghanistan and adjoining areas and is now common in Kashmir as well as other parts of India. Today, a belt is often fastened at the waist to hold it up. In the old days, it was customary to wear the *kāyāband* or sash at the waist. These days, a *Bhānd* will sometimes tie a whole bedsheet in jest at the waist during the summer or a blanket during the winter.

The Wudiny or Headscarf

The *Darzu* or boys dressed as Dard women often drape the *wudiny* (Hindi *odhnī*) or headscarf, which is also called *sārī*, around the head. While performing *rov* dance, they tie a scarf round the head. Today, some *Bhānd*s acting as women wear *salwâr* and *pheran* and wind an actual sārī around the head instead of the scarf.

The Khesh

This is a shawl of heavy patterned cloth. The *Bhānd*s use it in place of a tent in *Rāju Päthur* or *Darzu Pathur*. It was formerly used by Kashmiri Pandit women. They used to wear long *pherans* and tie them at the waist with a *khesh* in place of the *lūngy* (sash) or *kāyāband* (waistband). The *Bhānd*s would hold a *khesh* in their hands at the time of the *Daruz*'s or *Māgun*'s dance. Old *khesh*es with worn-out sheets of coarse cotton cloth are still in use today. In theatrical terminology, the *khesh* was called *palav* or cloth.

Caps

In *Bhānd Päthur* plays, actors often wear caps matching the dress of the character. In *Bata Päthur*, for instance, some wear the turban and some the Gandhi cap or fur cap. The *Bhānd* acting as the *Khwājā* (a man of distinction or wealth) wears a *qarāqulī* cap. The jester often wears a torn old tall hat, or a crooked turban, a Turkish cap, and so on. Women characters wear the *täch* (a round embroidered cap), *kasābā* (a small red cap worn by Muslim women), or *taranga* (the long cotton headdress of a Kashmiri Pandit woman).

Footwear

Bhānds do not pay any special attention to footwear. It is only when they perform *Batu Päthur* that they put on straw shoes. Today, however, they wear leather shoes, *chappal*s, *paizār* (slippers), etc. The jesters are usually barefoot.

The Whip

The whip is made of plaited hemp. The part that is held in the hand is thick, tapering down to the end which is as thin as the tip of a snake's tail. The *Māgun* uses the whip on the jester, who writhes in pain to comic effect. It is used in *Watal Päthur, Gosoñy Päthur*, and many

other plays. The crack of the whip also keeps the spectator alert. In Punjab, the mimics (*Naqqals*) use a wooden board with a handle to create a similar cracking sound.

Beard and Hair

The beard is made of hair sheared from a Bakarwāl's goat. It is fixed on the face and chin of the character with thin pieces of string tied at the back of the ears . In *Bakarwāl Päthur,* the beard is used on characters such as a Muslim holy man, a faqir, etc. The beards are black, white, or grey, and some of them are long. They are sometimes made of black wool. Nowadays, crêpe is also used to make beards, and has become an important part of an actor's make-up. In former times, boy dancers wore long hair so that they could act as women, but now ready-made wigs are used for the purpose. A few *Bhānd*s have real matted locks which they have obtained from *sadhū*s coming to Kashmir for the Amarnath pilgrimage. These *sadhū*s shave off their hair and beards on reaching Mattan. The colour of such hair is made fast by placing it before the flame of a burning *dhūnī.* The *Bhānd*s come on the stage with such matted hair fixed on their heads and surprise the audience.

The Decorative Band

The *Māgun* ties a decorative band of cloth called *bändy* over his turban, and into it he tucks a plume of feathers. This makes him look like a bridegroom. This is a two-inch wide band of shiny cloth.

Tabarzīn

This is a small axe. It has a handle eight to ten inches long, of the thickness of a pen. In *Darzu Päthur* it is carried by the *Māgun,* first at his waist and then in his hand. He uses it to scare the jester. Actually, the *tabarzīn* is only a symbolic weapon, and cannot kill even a chicken; it is carried in the *Māgun's* hand in place of a sword or an axe that could cause injury to a person. It is regarded as essential to protect oneself against evil.

The Plume

Walter R. Lawrence writes in his book *The Valley of Kashmir*: "In the past, every respectable person in Kashmir would wear a plume of blue heron's feathers." At the time of wedding, a plume of feathers was tied round a Kashmiri Pandit bridegroom's turban. But this went out of fashion after 1930. In Kashmiri folk plays, the *Māgun* still ties a plume to his turban (although the way it is tied, it does not look like a plume). Apart from the King or the *Māgun,* no other character wears a plume. However, occasionally, Āshaq Gosoñy too wears a plume.

The standard attire and accoutrements described above are not always worn in *Bhānd* performances today. Mostly, *Bhānds* perform their plays dressed in the clothes that they wear in daily life.

VĀD OR MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS

The term *vād* as used by *Bhānds* has several meanings. *Vād* means musical instrument, *vād* means to play music, *vād* means tone, *vād* also means a pattern of words or musical notes. *Vād* is actually derived from the Sanskrit word *vādya*, which means a musical instrument that can be played by blowing, by bowing, plucking, beating, stroking, and so on. In his *Nātyashāstra*, Bharat Muni has divided musical instruments into four categories: *ghana vādya*, *avanaddha vādya*, *sushira vādya* and *tata vādya*. Another treatise recognizes only three types of musical instruments: *tata*, *vitata*, and *tata-vitata*. Another expert calls them *charam*, *tantrikā* and *ghana*. Instruments belonging to serveral of these categories are used in the *Bhānd* theatre:

(1) *Tata Vādya*: Instruments which produce sound on being struck with a stick—wood or metal—are called *tata vādya*, for instance the gong which is struck with a stick or a mallet.

(2) *Avanaddha Vādya*: Instruments that are covered with leather or skin and produce sound when struck are called *avanaddha* or percussion instruments, for example the *mridanga*, *damāmā*, *nagārā*, tambourine, and *tumbaknār*, etc. Of these instruments, the drum and *nagārā* (kettledrum) are played in *Bhānd Päthur*.

(3) *Sushira Vādya*: Musical instruments which produce sound by blowing in breath or air (by mouth or other means) are known as *sushira vādya* or wind instruments. The *nay* or pipe, *svaranay* or *shehnāī*, the *bīn* or reed pipe, the harmonium, etc., are examples of *sushira* or wind instruments. In *Bhānd Päthur*, only the *svaranay* and *totaku* are played.

(4) *Tata* and *Vitata Vādya*: String instruments which produce sound when plucked by fingers or plectrum are called *tata vādya*. *The tambūrā*, *rabāb*, and *sitār* are examples of this type of musical instrument. The *vitata* type of stringed instruments are those which produce sound when played with a bow.

In *Bhānd Päthur*, the *svaranay*, the *dhol* or drum, and the *nagārā* or kettledrum are more often used, as the performance is held in the open where the sound of these instruments carries a long way. They would be too loud in any enclosed space.

The *dhol* is made by hollowing a stump of wood. It is a little wider in the middle than at the ends. Both the ends are covered with leather drawn tightly with leather straps. The *dhol* is played with two sticks. The stick held in the right hand is a bit thicker, and the one in the left hand is thinner. The *nagārā* is made by covering an earthen vessel called *dulij* with leather. It is tightened with leather strings. It is played with a pair of small sticks.

The Svaranay

This instrument is crafted by drilling holes in a piece of hollowed wood. In Kashmir it is fashioned by craftsmen of the Kulgam area. The *svaranay* is held between the teeth with a blade of wheat-grass; musical notes are produced by blowing into it and putting fingers on

the stops. It is a very old instrument of Kashmir as well as an important musical instrument of the *Bhānd* theatre. In Ladakh it is called *surnā*, which indicates that it travelled there from Kashmir.

The Gong

In Kashmir the gong has been in use in temples, palaces, and Buddhist *vihāras* from very early times. However, it is now sounded only in schools to mark periods.

Among the musical instruments which were in vogue in Kashmir in ancient times are the *vīnā*, *mridang*, *pataha*, *pushkar* and *tri-pushkar*, the flute and the lute. Apart from these, the pitcher, *damāmā*, *tumbaknār*, *kīna* and some earthen instruments were also played on various occasions.

In theatrical performances of the *Bhānds*, another instrument played was the *peshrau*. Shaped like an earthen tub, it was covered with leather and worn round the neck with a rope. Held close to the chest, it was played with two slender sticks. A similar instrument is played in Karnataka even today, and in the Jammu hills it is used by players belonging to the Valmiki tribe. It is no longer in vogue in Kashmir today. It produced a sound that could be rendered as '*tram tararam*'. Even today the word '*tram-tram*' exists in the Kashmiri language.

The hollowed horn of wild buffalo or stag was played in Kashmir in the old days; this musical instrument was called the *pog*. Similarly, instruments called *dāph* and *hāng* were also played. They have been mentioned in Nund Rishi's verses such as this: "*Pog yeli vāyan zamīn phatan . . . hā he hāng nār zan wazan*" ('When the *pog* is sounded, the earth bursts open . . . the *hāng* emits the fierce sound *hā he*.')

The Chang

The *chang* is a two-leaved musical instrument held between the teeth, with another leaf, thin as a wire, in the middle, which is played by the hand; even breath can serve the purpose. It is not in current use in *Bhānd Päthur*. One must have much skill and the ability to hold one's breath to be able to play this instrument.

SPECIAL ELEMENTS OF BHĀND PĀTHUR

Jesting, dialogue, music and dance are some of the principal elements of *Bhānd Päthur*. These are dealt with in the following paragraphs.

Jesting

In former times, there would often be several jesters in a play. In a typical sequence, one jester would come on the stage stealthily and lift his cap to expose his scalded head. A second jester would come and make as if to lick the scab on his head. A third would come

and lick the tongue of the second jester as though relishing the taste of the scab on his tongue. Or, as in *Darzu Päthur*, one jester would come and remove the *sārī* from the face of the *Daruz*— the boy dressed as a Dard woman—followed by a second jester who would brush his face against her hair. A third jester would then come in and run his hand over the second jester's face and then over his own hands and legs, all this to show that they have purloined and shared among themselves the scent of the perfumed hair oil that the *Daruz* had put on her hair. This has nothing to do with the plot of the play. It is pure buffoonery. It also helps to build up the jester's character. He is poor, a person to whom scented hair oil is not available. Wouldn't such a person crave its scent? The jesters tell one another about this craving and fall over each other to get at the scented oil. They bicker among themselves, fall down while running after one another, roll about, and finally scatter in flight through the crowd. In the process, they evoke much laughter.

In some plays, jesters serve to bring other characters to life. In *Bakarwāl Päthur*, for example, the jester makes fun of the Kashmiri spoken by a Gujjar. The goatherd himself is a humorous character. In his conversation with the jester in Kashmiri with a Gujjar accent, the Bakarwal's identity is established. In some plays, the jesters overdo their buffoonery. Sometimes they repeat their action. Thus buffoonery runs parallel to the main events projected through the scenes of a play.

While the *Bhānd*'s main job is mimicry, in a jester's role he often puts on a display of lameness, dumbness, stammering, blindness, old age, childishness, or idiocy. He may also jump about, stamp his feet, box an opponent's ears, etc., to amuse his spectators. He could wear funny dresses with pockets askew, wear a *pheran* turned back to front, or a shirt similarly turned around. He could put on a dirty cap, wear a long beard, an animal skin, a sash round his waist, or a tall hat. He might also enter the stage in his everyday wear, but tuck his shirt under the drawstring of his *salwār*, or lift the *salwār* for a laugh. He could wrap a blanket around his waist. If he happens to be wearing a *potsh*[42], he may have a cockishly tilted turban on his head and a blanket or bed-sheet tied around his waist. The jester does not paint his face. He moves about constantly on the stage from one end to the other—seemingly without purpose to the audience, but not so as far as the performance is concerned. He is unrestrained in his satirical remarks on each character. As a result, he is 'whipped' by the main characters. The audience hears the crack of the whip and is alerted to a shift in the dramatic situation.

The important character in each play is the one after whom the play is named, like the *Bata* or Brahmin in *Bata Päthur* or the *Gosoñy* or mendicant in *Gosoñy Päthur.* Other than these, all the rest are jesters. As a result, characterization suffers in this form of drama.

A point of etymology may be explained here. A jester is sometimes called '*daga*', as in *Bata Päthur*. Actually, *daga* is a wooden vessel in which water and oil-cakes were kept to feed cattle. *Daga* is also the name of a drum like the *tablā*, a hollow wooden object covered with leather. As it is built like a vessel, it is also called *pātra*. A jester is sarcastically called '*daga*' in the sense of an inferior vessel.

Stage Movement

As has been said earlier, *Bhānd Päthur* was generally performed in the precincts of shrines or venues of fairs. These places would be very crowded. Therefore, the actor had to deliver his lines in a loud voice so that everybody could hear him. He would move from one end of the stage to the other for that reason. Movements on stage by the actors in *Bhānd Päthur* fall into distinct patterns. The movement can be straight and direct when one character approaches another or engages him in a series of questions and answers or verse recitation. For example, in *Bata Päthur,* an old Pandit asks the *daga* (jester) his name. The jester in turn asks him his father's name, and the name of his father's father; in this manner, he elicits the names of eight past generations of the Pandit's family. Thus they come face to face and directly engage with each other. An oblique stage movement would become neessary where two or more characters create a situation which leads to the formation of a group or gathering. There could also be a circular movement where the players dance together on the stage, or a jester follows a character mimicking his manner. Since *Bhānd Päthur* is a folk play with a long tradition of performance, these movements have stabilized over a period of time.

Song

There is hardly any folk play in our country in which there is no singing. Some folk plays are totally musical. In *Bhānd Päthur* too snatches of humorous songs are sung; the style of singing is humorous too. All the forms of Kashmiri singing—*wanavun* (celebratory songs), *vatsan* (short lyrics), hoeing songs, *sidugūry vatsun*[43], *rov,* etc.—can be employed in the drama. Persian verses are also recited and sung. Some snatches of songs serve to increase the tempo as in the *Bata Päthur*—'*Ahy Rājū tay vahy Rājū, Rājū ho, Rājū hoy'*, or '*Bakhail fanāh gatshnay, mulku manzu gatsynay*'[44], etc. *Hlkat*, a dance for girls in which the tempo increases with cries of '*haku chhī-chhī*'[45], also creates the effect of speed. Some stage songs are sung to the tunes of *vīgy*[46] songs too.

Music

In *Bhānd Päthur*, musical instruments like the *svaranay*, drum and *nagārā* provide the background music. These are the instruments on which the entire choreography and effects of the drama depend. This music marks stage entries, accompanies singing, orchestrates fighting with sticks, and the dancing of horsemen. Overall, it lends colour to movements. All of it is Kashmiri music. There are at least three *svaranay* players, two *nagārā* players, and one drummer to perform at *Bhānd Päthur* plays. It is on the *svaranay* that different *vāds* or modes of music are played. Some of the important modes are *prävish* or entry, *salämy, darda nād, handi posh, savāry, gatku, sharāb, sālgāh, badrang, thado,* etc.

Dialogue

Bhānd Päthur is for the most part mimicry, and is performed to evoke laughter. The dialogue is set in accordance with the age, place, profession, and status of each character. It is mainly

humorous, with shades of sarcasm, ridicule, and captious criticism together with jokes and funny stories. It depends for effect on the actor's use of language and his style of delivery. At places there is less sarcasm and more of satire. Sometimes the language that is employed is indecent and abusive. There is no want of irascibility, impropriety, and bad humour in these plays. The songs are also full of humour and satire.

Acting

Theatrical art is the actor's art, whether it is folk theatre or the classical theatre. Whether the actor plays king or pauper or jester, he is basically an actor. So it is no surprise that *Bhānd*s engage in mimetic acts with great energy and expertise. They often mimic people of different trades in and around the village in a realistic manner. It is through acting that they bring alive each character, reproducing the typical language or dialect, the different accents, the mannerisms (such as stamping of feet), the feigning and pretence. These actors can imitate a female voice, a eunuch's voice, a child's voice, cries of animals, their gaits, etc. They focus on types that are common in their social life such as the milkman, the shepherd, the Pandit *munshi* (clerk), the *patwārī* (village accountant), the ironsmith, the tailor, the potter, the baker, the hakim or doctor, the compounder, the policeman, etc.

Women do not take part in a *Bhānd* play other than watching it. The roles of female characters are therefore played by *Bhānd* boys, sometimes wearing *peshwāz*, and sometimes everyday clothes. Nowadays wigs are in vogue, and these 'female' characters also wear ladies' *pheran*s and slippers (*paizār*).

Dialects and Accents

In Kashmir, the Gujarī, Pahārī, and Punjabi languages are spoken besides Kashmiri, though all with a Kashmiri accent. Similarly, Sikh Kashmiri, Gujjar Kashmiri, and Dogri Kashmiri are variants of the principal tongue. The differences between each variant and dialect come in handy to generate laughter. In Kashmiri itself, there are dissimilarities between the language spoken in *Marāz* or south Kashmir, *Kamrāz* or north Kashmir, and Srinagar city with regard to usage and accent. The *Bhānd*s exploit these differences in their acting. At times, actors distort the pronunciation of words and the listener splits his sides with laughter. However, there is certainly monotony in this kind of humour. A variety of themes, singing and dancing would have enlivened the drama, but this is not on offer.

Dancing

Dancing is an important component of *Bhānd Päthur*, but it has become so unrhythmical and disharmonious that it is difficult to trace back its real form. Formerly in *Bhānd* plays, the *Bata Päthur,* for instance, various agricultural activities from sowing to weaving of cotton were shown, as Lawrence has mentioned in his book. The particular dance form employed for this purpose was called *barang*. Today, no dance form except *rov*, in which the dancers snap their fingers, spin round and round, form pairs and engage in frenzied dancing is seen.

Film dances have also become common; *mudrā* or hand gestures, *laya* or rhythmic pace, *tāla* or musical measure, *hāv-bhāv* or expressive posture, have all started losing ground.

Bhānd Tsok

Tsok means the village square or crossroads where four ways meet. A religious fair in the precincts of shrines in four adjacent villages is also called *tsok*. For instance, the four-day fair held at Badarwân, Vilgām, Gohan and Soph Shālīpur villages near Kokarnāg; or the fair held on four consecutive days in Srinagar city at Batmaloo Sahib, Zaindar Sahib, Ropa Rishi Sahib, and the shrine near the Breyi Kuji locality. *Tsok,* or *Bhānd Tsok,* is also the term for a kind of dance shown at these fairs. This is a very old tradition connected with the nine days of the *Navarātra*s, a festival celebrated twice a year where the dance was performed as an offering to the deity. It was performed on crossroads in four adjacent villages before the idol installed on the occasion. Today, however, the element of faith is missing. The tradition is not unlike the *garbā* or *dandiā* dance performed during the *Navarātra* festival in Gujarat. There too a dance called *chāchar chowk* is presented before the goddess as an offering to the deity.

In Kashmir, *Bhānds*, musicians, dancing boys and jesters assemble at the start of the festival. Thirty or forty *svaranay* players, around ten drummers, and nearly twenty *nagārā* players raise a thunderous music. The boy dancers, jesters, and other artists hold each other's hands and dance in a circle. Afterwards, they form separate rings. Then they dance one by one. The dance shows a devotee coming as though from some distant place and bowing before the deity, and then slowly returning whence he came. Some dancers have tears in their eyes. Some come dancing with their gaze fixed on the deity and lighten their heart's burden. Then they clasp each other's hands (called *guly-mohar*) and dance in rings. At times there is not enough space for dancing owing to the numbers, raising a lot of dust, but the hand-grasp does not break till the end of the dance.

In former times, before the *Bhānd tsok* was held, *Bhānd*s went from village to village offering praise to God as they prepared to perform the dance. Faith is an essential element in it. It is a commonly held belief among the *Bhānd*s that if while performing the *Bhānd tsok* dance, someone should break the *guly-mohar* (hand-clasp), he was sure to die. However, now the tradition of *Bhānd tsok* is slowly coming to an end.

Prayer for the Welfare of All

Every *Bhānd Pāthur* performance ends with *duā-e khair* or prayer for the welfare and prosperity of all. On some occasions, *Bhānds* recite this prayer in the middle of a play when they want people to keep quiet. It is a deeply rooted belief in the minds of village folk that they must be present when this prayer for the welfare of all is recited towards the end of the *Bhānd tsok.* It is considered to be auspicious and beneficial to all. In the prayer, the welfare of Kashmir, the welfare of villages and towns, the welfare of Hindus and Muslims, the

welfare of rulers and common people, deliverance from diseases, earthquakes, tyrants and oppressors are all sought.

These, then, are some of the special elements which can help us put together an idea of the art of *Bhānd Päthur*. It is against this background that the paucity of specialized artists becomes apparent. Today, no one is taking any interest in playing the *svaranay*. Keeping time orally in the Kashmiri manner or humming tunes has been forgotten. The practice of learning dialogue by heart is on the wane. No one memorizes an entire song, only two or three lines of it. The old traditional plays are often unsuitable for present times, but the *Bhānd*s are not interested in creating something new. The present-day monotony of *Bhānd Päthur* has restricted the practice of this folk art. Humour being the mainstay of the drama, there is no scope for these plays to explore dimensions beyond the comic.

NORMS OF PERFORMANCE

The Nagārā Player

Before the play is performed, the *nagārā* player comes in and goes round the performance arena in a circular movement beating his drum, and the spectators then begin to take their seats around him. He is called *karydār* and his action is called *kor dyun*. Soon after him comes the drummer who provides accompaniment to the *svaranay* players. The space outside the *karydār*'s circle is now packed with people. The *vād* or musical mode changes after the beat of the *kor* and the players make their entry.

Entry

In *Darzu Päthur* or the farcical play about Dard women, it is the *Māgun* who makes his entry before everyone else, and with him enter the *Darzu* holding a cloth in their hands. They are followed by the group of jesters. All of them walk in step to the music. Last of all enters the elder jester who has a long beard and carries a bamboo stick in his hand. In the *Gosoñy Päthur*, an old mendicant enters the arena with a trident in his hand. After him enters a group of mendicants and after them the Pandits, and after the Pandits the jesters. In the same manner, in *Wātal Päthur* or the cobbler's play, Nābady Wātul enters the stage first with a piece of crumpled skin in his hand which he drags behind him all around. Then his wife and others come in. The jester does not enter the stage before the other actors in any play. The first to have right of entry on the stage is the *Māgun*.

The Stage

There is no need to set up an elevated structure for a dramatic performance by *Bhānd*s. The performance is held at the base of a plateau, the courtyards of shrines, in open fields,

roadsides, or fairgrounds. Being a form of folk theatre, it is not performed in halls or attics or drawing rooms or for those in strict *purdah*. The play performed for such restricted audiences is a single-character play associated with the *Bacha Nagmā* or a kind of duet presented by dancing boys—a song-and-dance routine. At some places, a *Bhānd Päthur* performance raises a lot of dust, but people keep watching it all the same. When it is performed at the base of a plateau, men and women are seated separately around the arena. Watching such a performance from a distance, it seems as though nature has carved out a circular space for the actors to perform so that thousands of people could watch a play seated comfortably. This arrangement is quite like the amphitheatre of ancient Greece erected two and a half millennia ago; only here, nature itself takes the credit as architect.

Time

There is no fixed time for performing a *Bhānd* play. However, at religious fairs, *Bhānds* hold their performance after the afternoon prayers. No artificial lighting is required for such performances. But when the *Bhānd Jashan* is held at night, the plays are performed under the light of the gas lamp or electric bulbs. When the *jashan* ends, people go back to their homes. In Dragmula, the place fixed for performances is adjacent to the shrine of Shah Wali. Here, one company will perform its play a little before prayer-time, while another company presents its play after the prayers. Usually, only certified parties put on their shows at such fairs. It is incumbent upon them to perform a *jashan* on reaching the fair. However, those *Bhānd*s who are unable to attend the fair for any reason, such as being unwell, are given the 'credit' of having performed at the venue if they compensate by playing the *svaranay* in their own homes, or by reciting the thanksgiving prayer, or by playing the *nagārā* in the name of the shrine. It is such short-cuts that have led to the degeneration of the art.

NOTES

1. The Kashmiri musical instrument *svaranay* is akin to the *shahnāī* or oboe but is smaller in size.
2. Play imitating the Bakarwals or goatherd community.
3. Play imitating the king.
4. Play imitating milkmen.
5. The entertainment of singing and dancing given by a *bachā* or boy dancer dressed as a woman.
6. A dance by a *hāfizā* or nautch girl accompanied by a chorus of singers and instrumental music.
7. A banquet or festival at which *bhānd*s give a theatrical performance.
8. One of the two principal parts—*Kramarājya* and *Madvarājya*—into which the Kashmir Valley was divided in ancient times. *Kamrāz* or *Kramarājya* comprises the districts on both sides of the River Vitasta or Jhelum below Srinagar, corresponding to the northern part of the valley.

9. *Marāz* or *Madvarājya* comprises the part of Kashmir above Srinagar, corresponding to the southern part of the Valley.
10. The late Prof. P. N. Pushp was a well-known Kashmiri scholar.
11. Dards are a mountain people living in areas to the north and north-west of the Kashmir Valley. The word *Daruz* is the feminine of 'Dard' and means Dard women. '*Darzu päthur*' is a humorous play imitating the mannerisms and conduct of Dard women. The play is frequently played by *Bhānd*s.
12. A greatly revered Kashmiri saint-poet who lived in the 15th century.
13. A celebrated Kashmiri saint-poetess of the 14th century.
14. Page 256, second reprint 2011, first ed.1895.
15. *Ibid.*
16. *Ibid.*
17. *Ibid.*
18. Kashmiri Pandits are called *Bata* (Skt *Bhatta*) in Kashmiri. *Bata Päthur* is a play performed by Bhānds imitating the behaviour of Kashmiri Pandits.
19. The *Buhury* were a trading caste of Kashmir, probably of Punjabi origin. They were usually grocers and vendors of medicinal herbs and had adopted the lifestyle of Kashmiri Pandits.
20. Walter R. Lawrence, *The Valley of Kashmir,* pp. 312–13
21. *Ibid.*, p. 313.
22. *Ibid.*
23. A form of Kashmiri folk music sung to the accompaniment of a small, jar-shaped earthen musical instrument called *tumbaknär* and other instruments.
24. Kashmiri (Hindu) New Year's Day.
25. *Vākh* is a Kashmiri verse form of four lines popularized by the celebrated saint-poetess Lal Ded.
26. Kashmiri short lyric.
27. Praise of the Prophet Mohammad.
28. The *kāngrī* is a portable earthenware fire-pot used by Kashmiris to keep themselves warm in the winter.
29. The head and stage manager of a party of *Bhānd*s.
30. A feudal aristocrat.
31. A village headman.
32. An ascetic turned lover—a character in *Bhānd Päthur* who, though an ascetic, is shown falling in love.
33. Current spelling Xuanzang.
34. *Lūngy* is a kind of sash Kashmiri Pandit women used to tie at the waist. It is no longer in use now.

35. A kind of dance in which women in two lines face each other while singing a song, taking one step forward and one step backward.

36. A song sung by women in chorus on a festive occasion like marriage.

37. A Kashmiri dish of mincemeat balls.

38. A verse form.

39. An early Kashmiri work based on the teachings of an esoteric sub-sect of the *Krama* school of Kashmir Shaivism.

40. A kind of frenzied dancing characterized by stamping of feet.

41. Makers of winnowing trays.

42. A long gown-like cotton garment worn by Kashmiris.

43. Songs of the *Siddhagūr*s. The *Siddhagūr*s were a sect of eunuchs who earned their living by singing and dancing. The original sect was based somewhere in Jammu but it had its adherents in Kashmir also.

44. "May the niggards perish, may they be banished from the country!"

45. *Hikat* or *hikche* is a kind of game played by two girls or young women in which they hold each other's hands with their feet close together. Then, bending their bodies backwards, they dance uttering the cry *'haku-chhī-chhī'*.

46. *Vyūg* is a *rangolī*-like circular pattern drawn on the ground with coloured powders on which the Kashmiri Pandit bride and bridegroom at a wedding or a boy after investiture of the sacred thread stand. The songs women sing on this occasion are called *vīgy vatsan.*